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1880

FOUR SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE

HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY

QUEEN VICTORIA

IN 1841 AND 1842.

Published by Command.

BY

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TO
HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY
QUEEN VICTORIA

These Sermons,

PREACHED BEFORE HER,

AND NOW PUBLISHED BY HER COMMAND,

ARE,

WITH HER GRACIOUS PERMISSION,

DEDICATED,

BY

HER MAJESTY'S MOST DEVOTED AND LOYAL SERVANT,

SAMUEL WILBERFORCE.

SERMON I.

CHRIST AND THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

Preached in the Private Chapel of Windsor Castle,

Sept. 26, 1841.

SERMON I.

THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

S. LUKE vii. 13.

“ And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.”

THE beautiful simplicity of this narrative no doubt struck each one of us as we heard it in the Gospel of the day. The words in which it is related are the fewest and simplest possible. It is ushered in with no note of preparation ; no sound of trumpets proclaims that a great marvel is about to startle our eyes and arrest our attention. It is as it ever is when God is nigh. The still small voice speaks of His nearest presence. It is told as if it was a

common thing—and yet that which was wrought there was indèed a marvel—nay, it was one of the greatest of the marvels of this world of wonders ; for it was the open wrestling of the Prince of Life with Death—the manifesting to all eyes which looked upon it, that in His hands were “ the keys of hell and of death ”¹—that “ He openeth, and no man shutteth ; He shutteth, and no man openeth.”²

The Lord was drawing near to the little town of Nain ; and just before He reached it, a funeral train passed through the city gateway. True-hearted mourners were there ; for upon that bier was borne to one of the distant cemeteries of the Jewish people the only son of a widowed mother. Through what scenes do these

¹ Rev. i. 18.

² Rev. iii. 7.

words at once carry back our thoughts! The early promise of a sunny life—domestic blessings, for a season—and then the universal lot of all that are born of woman,—the rising cloud of sorrow, faint at first as the morning mist, and small as a man's hand; a little cloud out of the sea, just blotting the fair sky at a single point, but spreading soon over the whole heavens black and threatening; and then the house of joy turned into the house of mourning, the bride grown into a widow; but having still one treasure more, one only son, who became, as distance mellowed the sharpest outlines of ever-present sorrow, a new sun to her world, till her heart rejoiced again in its beauty and its radiance—for a season;—and then again the little cloud shewed its faintest

outline on the far horizon; but now there was a wakeful eye ready to observe its first dim shadow—to read beforehand its message of sorrow—to forecast it all, by the deep lore learned only of sad experience. And again it thickened, and opened wide its wings. And then there followed the sick-bed watchings, and the wasting interchange of hope and fear, which strove together in that chamber as though they cast their ventures for that mother's heart. And fear has won: the feeble life with which her own is intertwined grows manifestly weaker, and the fevered pulse beats higher and higher, until its beats are numbered, and the last sigh has been breathed out; and watching is over; and the active ministries of love have found their end; and the sinking heart in that

still silence repeats to itself, as one that would learn thoroughly his lesson, those fearful syllables—"No more."

And now she "bears him forth"—a strange end, however needful, of so much love—to "bury her dead out of her sight:" though she shall see him still, every day and every hour, by a keener sight; and she weeps as she goes forth, as one most truly oppressed and desolate. And then, by chance, as men's language speaks, she met this stranger. But it was no chance; and He that met her was no stranger to the burden under which her spirit had bowed down. All was before His eye; all was ordered by His love: the sorrow which had made her cup so bitter, it had been of His own mingling; the tears she had shed, He had marked

them all. Doubtless to purge away some clinging dross had those fires been let to wax so hot ; doubtless for the ripening of some precious fruit all that sharp pruning had been ordered by the wise Dresser of the vineyard. And now He threw Himself in her way, at the last, as she bore forth her son, when all seemed over : as is His wont, meeting us when earthly aids are gone, and shewing Himself then, in our utter need, the true helper of our weakness. And “ He touched the bier.” What there was of commanding majesty about His mien we know not ; but they who bare it saw at once that this was no common touch ; for they “ stood still,” stood in expectation. Nor did they wait long in vain. Stranger words were those which He spoke than had even crossed

their thoughts ; for He spake not to them. He looked with compassion upon the stricken mother, and He said unto her, “ Weep not.” Surely they saw at once He could not mean to mock her utter misery by the mere cold forbidding of her tears ; and yet how else could He speak these words to her ? To bid the springing fountain restrain its streams, this were easier far than to bid her heart to cease from weeping. Yet such was His command ; and to it He added words yet stranger in their sound ; for, turning to the corpse, He spake to those ears which the mighty seal of death had closed against all voices of the earth ; and He said, “ Young man, I say unto thee, arise ! ” He spoke, and He was heard ; for “ he that was dead sat up, and began

to speak ; and He delivered him unto his mother :” and her astonished heart found out all the hidden meaning of the “ weep not” of the Lord.

Such were the works of our Saviour’s earthly ministry ; and it is of no little moment that we enter fully into their significance.

By them, then (1st), He manifested forth His glory ; they were the counter-signs and credentials of His mission. By them (2d), again, He shewed the infinite compassion wherewith His heart was full. By them (3d), He lightened the burden of human suffering. Further (4th), they are the abiding witness to the Church of the truth of His Divinity. To so much we assent readily, and as of course ; but we must go deeper, if we would gain all

the blessing to be gathered from these wondrous works.

In them, then, we see the working of the Son of man. They were wrought by our blessed Master as the second Adam—as the true Man, the Head of the restored family. They were meant to assert for man the true honour which belongs to him in the Church of the redeemed. Sin had brought man under the dominion of the powers of this world and the spirits of darkness; and cruelly had they trampled upon him who was meant to be their lord. The miracles of our blessed Master were a testimony against man's submission to them—a promise of his full deliverance. They speak to all the race of man; and shew every one that in Him their head, and joined to Him, they also

may be more than conquerors of all these outward things. Thus when our Lord as man, by His mere word, healed the sick, He asserted for man a freedom from the dominion of disease : when He broke those mysterious bonds by which the evil one had bound the spirits of possessed men, He asserted for us a freedom from Satan's service, a mastery over his power: when He raised up the dead, He taught us that in Him, the second Adam, death itself was conquered; that we, Christian men as joined to Him, and dwelt in by His Spirit, might trample even on this last enemy; that our death was but a sleep, a sleep in Him—the sleep of a weary child, leading to a glad awakening. So that these mighty works thus bring before us the true glory of our redeemed

state. They shew us, in the person of our Lord, for what each one of us is training who of His mercy have been baptised into Him, and are daily seeking to grow up into Him in all things. They shew us why and how we should strive after a closer union with Him ; that we too may triumph with Him over these rebellious powers, under which our race has so long groaned. They shew us how far we sink below the majesty of this our Christian birth, if we let any thing whatever sever us from Him the Lord of life.

For He is the healer of our spirits as He is of our bodies. Here, too, His words are "spirit and are life;"¹ for with them goeth forth the mighty Spirit of life. For the soul of man, as well as

¹ S. John vi. 63.

for his body, thus did Christ assert deliverance and an unfettered liberty. To each one who by a true faith is joined to Him, He promises, as by a sign, in every mighty work a full enfranchisement of spirit.

And for this cause it is that still He walks up and down amongst us; that still His widowed Church weeps day and night before Him, bearing forth to meet Him her lifeless children, slain by sin; if haply some look or word of love from Him may fall on them, and breathe life into their souls. For this cause it is that through the means of grace He meets us Himself and sets our spirits free; that in His word He speaks to us; that in our prayers He suffers us to speak to Him; that in baptism He does indeed receive

us ; that in the holy eucharist we feed by faith upon His flesh and blood ; that in the Church His saints are all before us, His holy angels round us, His Spirit put within us, He Himself close beside us.

For He is the healer of the soul as He is of the body. He meets us bearing forth our dead hopes through the city's gate ; He meets us when our hearts are faint and weary ; when we feel the emptiness of all with which this world has sought to cheat our earnest longings for the great, the real, and the true. He stands beside the bier, he bids us weep no more, he stops our mourning steps ; the dead hear Him ; hopes of youth, aspirations of heart, dreams of purity, of reality, of high service, with which once

our spirits kept glad company, but which had withered, and sunk, and died, as the hot and scorching sun of common life arose upon us,—these revive; they sit up; they begin to speak; they find a voice; they turn to Him; and He gives them back to us, and bids us cherish them for Him; keep their company on earth, and find them change hereafter into the angels of His presence. On Him, then, may our affections fix: on Him, the Healer, the Restorer of humanity, may our hearts learn to lean the secret burden of their being; and this not in words only, in which we are all ready enough to do so, but in very deed and truth.

I. If earthly trouble is upon us, let us fly to Him; let us beware of all those who would cheer us without Him; let

us be always sure that the poison of the asp is hidden under their softest and most enticing words. Do they profess to put away from us our heavy thoughts? let us beware lest instead of this they rob us of the very reality of our lives; lest they make all around us to be henceforth a mere show; lest there play round us ever afterwards the unreal colours and the mocking voices of a juggle and a dream; lest we lose ourselves in merely outer things. False friends, indeed, are all such; for they would keep us from the only source of true peace; they would mock our thirsty spirits, as we cross, parched and weary, the burning sands of this desert world, with the lying promise of unreal water. The broad expanse of those cooling waves seems to

lie ever but a little way before us, but they dry up into sand and disappointment as we draw nigh their brink; they melt into the yielding air as we stretch forth the hand to raise them to our lips. From all such comforters, then, let us turn away. Let us beware of every thing which, under any promise, would take us out of ourselves and separate us from God. At such seasons let us even keep ourselves as free as may be from necessary business; let us strive to hush our spirits into silence, that there may be nothing to intercept that voice which will speak to us if we wait for it; let us fear lest we be led to seek for any other shelter of our spirits short of Him their Lord; that so we may find ourselves to be alone with Him; that He may frame

and fashion us ; may mould our hearts as He will ; may purify, and enlighten, and soften, and strengthen, and deepen them by His presence in the cloud and mystery of sorrow. Let us remember always the love which is smiting us, nor dare to look at our griefs but in the light of His presence ; lest looking at them alone, we be soured by their sharpness, or become fretful, or dull, or even desperate, and so reprobate. Let us cast ourselves upon the assurance of His love, even though it bear the semblance of the flame-breath of the furnace ; and walk humbly with Him, lest we mar or hinder the blessed purpose of His mercy towards us.

II. Or, is it the heavier burden of spiritual trouble under which we groan ? Let us see here that His purpose is the

same. For why does God suffer this to harass oftentimes His faithful servants, but to teach them to lean more simply upon Him? How ready are we to swell into a vain independence! How hard is it to keep always to that humble leaning upon Him, in which is the only secret of our strength—to know, that without Him we are but as lifeless limbs, which have neither strength, nor coherence, nor nervous energy, nor certain meaning! Do we, then, still wonder that we are often cast down? Surely this is a token of His care, who orders all things for us. For if even in sorrow and depression we are thus prone to independence, what should we become without them? Even as it is, with the sense of these wants forcing daily upon us our need of Him, are we not

too ready to live without Him ; to have a religion of notions and of phrases, and not of life ? How often are we even conscious or half-conscious to ourselves that we are not reaching forth after a living union with Christ ; that our prayers are cold, and little else than form ; that our spiritual life is but an unsubstantial dream, whilst yet we shrink from the sharp effort which would break through this fantastic illusion, and bring us indeed close to Him ? In how many, alas, does this continue, until there creeps over their souls, if not active unbelief, yet an utter benumbing of all living faith ; until they do not believe in the love of Christ to them, without which there can be no springing forth of the fountains of the heart to Him ; no filial confidence in God our

Father ! And here is our only remedy : simply to turn to Him ; to lay hold upon His cross ; or, at the least, to seize upon the hem of His garment ; to see that He is the Lord of our life, our Atonement, our Strength.

For this end has the Church this day brought before us this work of mercy. That we may read in it His power, His presence, His compassion ; His yearning love to every soul whom He hath purchased. That we may see Him as our Peace, our Hope, our Rest ; that we may seek indeed, in union with Him, conquest over death and all its terrors,—conquest over sin and all its powers ; that He may speak to us, stretched as we, yea we our very selves, are stretched upon the bier, His blessed words of life,

“Young man, I say unto THEE, arise :”
and that as He speaks, His Spirit may
enter into us, and we rising up in heart
in its new strength, may live with Him,
and with Him triumph over death.

SERMON II.

THE CHARACTER OF THE VIRGIN MARY.

*Preached in the Private Chapel of Windsor Castle,
Jan. 2, 1842.*

SERMON II.

THE CHARACTER OF THE VIRGIN MARY.

S. LUKE ii. 19.

“ But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.”

THERE are few points in which the marvellous power of God's word is more shewn than in the perfect distinctness and keeping of the various examples it brings before our eyes. Each saint has his own character ; which, whether sketched in a few passing touches, or drawn in the elaborate detail of a continued narrative, has all the freshness and reality of life. Almost every one who appears in its

pages seems specially intended to afford warning and encouragement to some special form of character, or in some special difficulties of situation. It is indeed the book of man's heart; so that, as he reads its pages, the English peasant of this day finds unawares the key to that which is passing in his soul, in the troubles and joys, in the prayers and psalms, of some Eastern patriarch, some Jewish king, or some Galilean fisherman.

Little as is recorded of her, no character is better marked than that of the mother of our Lord. This verse, which we have read in the Gospel of to-day, brings it at once before us: "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." The musing, meditative mind, the meek activity, the submissive

joyfulness, of her faithful spirit, are expressed in every word.

Great things were these which she kept, and most fit for earnest pondering. Great were they to all, greatest to her, the "highly favoured" amongst women. Life was opening strangely upon her; and the last few months had crowded into their narrow compass all that was most fit to stir the very depths of her spirit. Brought up in the comparative seclusion which shut in Jewish damsels, the angel of the Most High had stood suddenly beside her, and troubled her mind by the strangeness of his salutation. Then had followed the fears and hopes which the promise of that angel-visitor had interwoven with her very being. The "Desire of all nations" was at last to

come, and she should be indeed His mother. From her should spring that mighty Redeemer, to give birth to whom had been the earnest longing of every Jewish mother. What hopes and wonder must have filled her soul ! At length the months of waiting passed away, and the gracious birth was come, the promised Child was born, the Son of hope was given ; and still how much was there upon which to muse and ponder ! There was the full tide of a mother's love for the Babe which slept beside her ; there was the awful reverence of her pious soul for the unknown majesty of Him who of her had taken human flesh. Depths were all around her, into which her spirit searched, in which it could find no resting-place. How was He, this in-

fant of days, the everlasting Son? How was He to make atonement for her sins and the sins of her people? When would the mystery begin to unfold itself? As yet it lay upon her thick and impenetrable; all was dark around her; mighty promises and small fulfilments seemed to strive together in the womb of time. The angel had called Him Great, the Son of the Highest; but He lay there on her bosom weak and wailing as any other babe. He was to sit upon the throne of David; yet He was cradled in a manger. Angels broke on mortal sight, to make His birth-place known; yet none but the shepherds of Bethlehem had heard their message. A star from heaven guided eastern magi to His feet; but they made their offerings in a stable. She was

“highly favoured” who had borne Him; yet a sword should pierce through her own soul. All was full of contradictions; yet amidst all she was unmoved. To the eye of a passing observer she might have seemed perhaps insensible; such a quietness there was about her. Did she know her own greatness? Did she feel the strangeness of all around her? Did her soul yearn over this Babe, and reach forth to comprehend His unknown destiny? or was she indeed destitute of kindling feelings? No; “she kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart;” not one escaped her; but the current of her soul flowed far too deeply to babble forth its emotions. The “ornament of a quiet spirit” shrouded the mighty swellings of her heart. She was

in God's hands : this one thought was her anchor. " Behold the handmaid of the Lord : " this was her talisman. How the mystery was to work itself out, she knew not ; but God knew : and she was ever more and more learning that great secret of strength,—the leaving all in His hands ; not in carelessness or thoughtlessness, but in the earnest musings of a trustful spirit ; and great need had she, all her life through, for the constant exercise of that same blessed temper. Unlike as He who was without spot of sin must have been to every other child, yet was there nothing which distinctly declared to her His future course. For we find her " seeking after Him," and " sorrowing," whilst He was " about His Father's business." We find her watching

with patient expectation the wonders of His opening ministry ; we see her following Him step by step even when His brethren believed not on Him : but still it was plainly in ignorance of whither He was leading her : it was not that she knew all ; it was that she was content, when she knew not all, to rest upon what she did know, to glean up the intimations of God's purpose, to ponder them in her heart, to trust to Him in whom she believed. And well was it for her that so she did ; for what a lesson was that which she had line by line to learn, till it was perfected beneath the cross at Calvary ! How awfully did those sounds, " Woman, behold thy Son," break in on all the hopes and expectations which, doubtless to the very end, her heart had cherished !

Yet even for that her faith sufficed. Such was the fruit of gathering up in musing quietness that which was given to her ; of ever living in Christ's presence ; of marking God's ways, and so learning to submit to them.

So that this is the lesson taught us in the character of the Virgin Mary. The blessedness of cultivating a quiet, trusting spirit, a deep inward piety, a calm, waiting soul, by musing on God's dealings. For this was what distinguished her ; this was the groundwork of that strength and nobleness of character which we trace in her. This, therefore, we should likewise cultivate, who would share her blessedness. For this will be to us too, of God's blessing, a means of acquiring that pious cheerfulness of temper which is the na-

tural mother of high and noble conduct. For it is not in a loud profession or an obtrusive exterior, but in its silent inner power of bowing our will to that of God, of filling our common life with His presence, that true religion shews itself.

And as this lesson is of general importance, so does it specially befit this season.

First, because now again we celebrate the birth in the flesh of the everlasting Son of God; and, Secondly, because we stand to-day upon the threshold of another year. For each of these is a call to us to cultivate this grace, of which the Virgin Mary is so bright a pattern. In what other temper can we look with safety at the mysteries which Christmas brings before us? How else can we

receive the great truth, that He who was, from all eternity, the only Son of God, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, did indeed so perfectly take our nature, that whilst He ceased not to be God, He became man as truly as we are? In no other spirit than that of humble, thoughtful faith can we receive this teaching. Fathom its wonders we cannot. Neither man nor angel can reach down into its depths; yet to every faithful soul is it full of all comfort. If we, like Mary, simply receive it on the word of God; and then, like her, make it our own by secret meditation, “keeping all these things, and pondering them in our hearts,”—what a light beams out from them on its inner darkness! He has become man, and as man He has

suffered for us—He who was God, and as God had that to pay which we had forfeited, and could not pay. Here is the only foundation of real peace for every heart which knows its own deep capacities of joy, and its yet deeper need of purification and atonement. He has suffered, and therefore I am free. His humanity is my very ransom; it stands between me and my sin—between my sin and the just wrath of a holy God.

Again; in this, to every faithful soul, is the best assurance of the infinite compassion of the Lord. He who stooped so low to save us, when we knew Him not, will not, cannot leave us to perish, when we seek His mercy.

Here, again, is that which assures us of our Saviour's sympathy amidst all the

trials and harassing perplexities of life. From the everlasting Son of the eternal Father, clothed in majesty, robed in light unapproachable, creating the universe, ruling over the hosts of heaven, we seemed too infinitely distant to count on sympathy : but on the Virgin-born, on the Son of David, on the Man of Sorrows, on the human nature of our Lord, our wounded souls can rest their anguish, our tempted souls can stay their weakness ; for He too was perfected through suffering ; yea, He can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, having been in all points “ tempted like as we are.”

And, once more, here is that which gives its reality to the life of redeemed men ; here is that which fills and glorifies every earthly relation,—that Christ, the

true Man, Himself partook of them ; that He took on Him, and surrounded Himself with, the bonds of family life ; that He, with whom all was reality, was what we are now ; that in Him, therefore, and through Him, that life which, without Him, was an empty and deceiving shadow, grows into a great reality ; that in becoming the Virgin's Son, in bearing our very nature, He hath for every faithful man for ever raised and glorified his new and ransomed life in all its parts and accidents. For He has shewed us that we may, as men, and in the things of men, truly serve the Lord our God. So that all things are now full of Him. Domestic blessings, family affection, and the joys of the homestead—these are now holy things ; for they are seen in Him who knew

not sin. The joys of earthly friendship, and its tears—in these our Master went before us; in them God may be honoured. In doing good to men, in fulfilling worthily our part in this world, we may, through His grace, be doing that which Jesus did. So that life has again become a great reality to those who trust in Him. For this is the true character of our redeemed life,—the bringing into every part of it the blessed presence of a reconciled Father. It is not to consist in a sour refusal of the blessings which He gives us—in wearing a sad and solemn countenance, when His earth is rejoicing round us; it is not to be shewn by our putting on the garb of an unnatural and unkindly separation from our fellows; but in receiving all from Him as our justification, our peace,

our righteousness; and then going forth to serve Him simply in our daily tasks, to delight in Him with renewed health, to honour Him with grateful thoughts, and to see His perpetual presence in every thing around us.

Here, then, is a Christmas store of purifying, cheering thoughts, for those who “keep all these things, and ponder them in their hearts.” These are blessed truths, which speculation and the bold ventures of the intellect are sure to miss; which belong not to a frozen formality of observance, or a noisy profession of peculiar zeal; but which, of God’s great mercy, steal gently down, in holy musings, upon teachable and quiet spirits.

The same lesson is spoken to us by the season we have once more reached.

Standing as we do this day upon the border of two years, both that which is gone from us, and that on which we are entering, call on us to ponder on the ways by which God has led us, and to keep them in our heart. For He it is who has broken up our life into these divisions. It had been as easy, had He seen fit, that they should have flowed on in one even stream, without this constant interchange of day and night, and seasons and years. But in so appointing them, He meant, doubtless, to set thick the natural year with remembrancers for Him—to give us natural times, and in them evident calls, for pondering on His dealings with us. Whether we choose or not, our minds will use them thus in some degree. Thoughts of what filled our hearts at this time last

year rise upon us almost unbidden ; and the past period marches forth before us its dead hours in dim procession. It is ours to choose whether we will turn this natural impulse to a higher profit—whether we will seek to form a just and sober estimate of the life that we are spending.

To do which, we must look,—

I. At the sins of this past year ; at our transgressions of God's law ; at our failures in serving Him. How quickly do they pass away from our treacherous recollection ! Whatever they may be, we forget them of ourselves too soon ; and we have a thousand aids ready to put them the sooner from our thoughts. And so we do not repent of them, and we gather no wisdom from them ; but let them continue to eat into our hearts with their

consuming rust. On this first Sunday, then, of the new year, let us encourage these thoughts, that we may see wherein we have offended, and take a due estimate of our lives.

How great a mystery is shut up in them ! How little can the life of any Christian man be that disjointed, unmeaning thing, which in our conduct we seem often to consider them ! They are indeed an undivided whole ; every hour has an influence on that which follows it ; and the great result of all is but the summing up of the influences which have filled our days. But of this we lose sight, because we do not use these opportunities of thought. Our minutes fly by us, and they seem to leave us for ever ; and we forget that it is the very wonder of

our lives that leave us they cannot ; that even as they seem to pass, they cling to us ; that they are taken up into our very selves, making us what they have been, more fit or more unfit for that unseen Presence—for that heavenly kingdom.

II. Again ; on such a day as this we should reckon up God's dealings with us in the year gone by. We should muse upon the sorrows He has sent us, of which we only bear the sting and lose the blessing, if we let them pass us by unheeded. For every one of them was sent in love and wisdom : sent then, rather than before or after, because at that time we were ripe to profit by them. Sent as we could bear them, and with Grace, if we would use it, to turn them into untold blessings. Sent to lead us

up to Him ; to wean us gently from an earthly mind ; to teach us, in the midst of outward things, to lean on His ready help, and to commune with Him.

III. We should look back, too, on the mercies of the year gone by ; on the blessings with which God has crowned our days ; on the evils He has turned aside ; the perils through which He has brought us safely. For thus only can we duly praise Him ; thus only can we indeed know the presence in which we are walking ; the powers which are around us ; the mystery which is within us.

IV. And thus shall we be fitted also to look on into the coming year. Not as if we could lift up the curtain which is drawn in mercy over its unknown events ;

—for who could bear life with peaceful thankfulness, if he could thus live over, in thought, before their time, all its griefs and burdens?—but that we may now, thoughtfully, and in God's strength, set ourselves, throughout this coming year, to serve the Lord more faithfully; that we may look on into it with the quiet confidence of a Christian's hope; that we may be ready for duties, and prepared for events. We know not indeed what it may bring forth for us; but this we know,—it cannot sever us from Christ our Saviour; it cannot change our Father's love; it cannot weary out His care. There shall not be in it one storm without His bidding, one pang without His presence. Only let us fill our minds with this chastening, elevating recollec-

tion of His faithfulness and love; and bring what it may, we shall be ready for it; for the “peace of God shall keep our hearts through Jesus Christ His Son.”

SERMON III.

THE CANAANITISH MOTHER.

Preached in the Chapel of the Pavilion, Brighton,
Feb. 20, 1842.

SERMON III.

THE CANAANITISH MOTHER.

S. MATT. xv. 28.

“Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

THERE are many remarkable features in this short narrative, which forms the Gospel of the day. Our Lord had just quitted His usual haunts, and passed into a district which had known none of His labours or miracles. He had left the land of Judah, and was “in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.” He had withdrawn Himself thither for a season of retirement, and

paused a while in the work of His ministry. "He entered into an house, and would have no man know it." Being here amongst the Gentiles, He did not proclaim that salvation which He offered freely to the Jews. Yet here was He followed by the cries of at least one bleeding heart. By some means or other, the fame of His miracles had reached one Gentile woman dwelling in those parts. The Healer had come near her house, and in that house was one who needed healing: she had "a young daughter vexed with an unclean spirit;" and she had faith strong enough, Gentile as she was, to believe that He could interfere on her behalf; that He could and would rebuke the enemy, and cast him out. Strong, therefore, in the deep impulses

of a mother's love, she set forth to seek His aid. How little could a chance observer have known the flood-tide of feelings which was swelling high in her heart! Her all was at stake. That "young daughter" at her home, to whom early sickness and sorrow had but given a larger grasp upon a mother's love,—she was now, if ever, to be set free from this fearful struggle with the unclean powers of darkness. But would HE listen to her prayer—to the prayer of an outcast Gentile? Was HE MAN's healer, or the healer of the Jew alone? Would He listen to the mere cry of suffering humanity? or were His mercies bounded by the covenant with Abraham? Such thoughts must have swept over and darkened her soul. She stood before Him with a bursting

heart : faith, hope, fear, humility, a mother's agony, struggled within her, and she fell at His feet and besought Him that He would put forth His power : “ Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David ! my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.”

And He—how did He receive her ? He who had never turned away from any sufferer's cry,—how did He deal with her ? “ He answered her not a word.” It was a strange reception : and such clearly it was felt to be by His disciples. They knew not how to understand it. They longed to intercede for her : and at length they ventured ; yet evidently as men in confusion, and not daring to speak out their inner feelings, and so putting their entreaty on wrong grounds :

“Send her away; for she crieth after us:” grant her request, that we may be rid of her importunity. With what eagerness would she catch at this succour! unless, indeed, her “great faith” had already learned rather to trust simply to His love than to any lower intercessor. But the disciples could not win for her her boon.

“I am not sent,” was His reply to them, “but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Words which presented just that side of the truth which seemed to fall in with all their Jewish notions, and wholly stopped their intercession for her. But even this, worse though it was than the silence which had gone before it,—even this could not still that mother’s urgency. “Then came

she and worshipped Him." It was as when one casts oil upon the flames. So much was within reach, that she must gain it. She had been taught the lesson she was practising in that school in which so many find their first true teacher,—in the school of family life and family sorrow. Through her natural affections she had mounted up, as it would seem, to higher and spiritual things; for to a wonderful degree did she enter into the secrets of His mysterious nature; "she worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me!" She pierced, as though by the intuition of some blessed instinct, through the veil in which He was shrouded. Her faith laid its hold at once upon His very Godhead, and on His true humanity. As God, she fell before Him—she worshipped Him;

as man, she appealed to His feeling for the sorrows of man's heart, crying to Him, "Lord, help me!" She reached on to that entire sympathy which was to be the fruit of His being "perfected through suffering." "Thou that art the Man of Sorrows; by Thy man's heart, and by the covenant of Thy suffering, help me in my woe."

Twice more, we know, she seemed to be refused; and yet she persevered. In that answer which opens to our eyes the wonderful depth of humility in which the strength of her patient faith had been ripened for this fearful trial, she pleaded with Him, as a dog beneath the table, for the crumbs which fell from the greatness of His bounty. So long she endured; and then the mystery was

plain. He had but tried her faith, and perfected her patience. There was in her heart a hidden treasure which was thus brought forth; there was in it the fine gold, to which this hour of agony had been as the refiner's fire. Her faith had met with its merciful reward; her importunity had not been fruitless: what she could not win through the intercession of Apostles, had come straight to her, an abject Gentile, from the Lord of life. The tide of mercy had overflowed the narrow banks of God's straiter covenant: she to whom He "was not sent," who was not of the house of Israel, who was a stranger to the covenant of promise,—she had found Him, from seeking after whom neither silence nor repulses could turn her back. Her importunity had won

its answer ; for indeed it was itself His gift. The fire upon the altar of her heart had been kindled by the beams of His own countenance ; her cleaving to Him was His gift ; her love the reflection of His love to her ; He had put the words into her mouth, and He had strengthened her to speak them. And so the end was sure : she had knocked, and the door had opened ; she had asked, and she received : “ O woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

Such is the narrative ; and in all its parts we may read that which concerns ourselves most closely. For what else are our lives, with all their varying accidents and issues, than, as it were, the

shadows cast forward into all time by these dealings of the Son of God with man whilst He stood amongst us in the flesh? How have these events of the lake-side at Gennesareth, of the Temple in Jerusalem, of the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, been again and again acted over in succeeding generations, as men stand in His Church before Him, and either trust in Him and seek to Him, or pass Him by and disregard Him! How are they, even at this moment, being acted over by ourselves! For He has come nigh unto us; yea, He stands amongst us—He, the Healer of our spirits; He, our heart's true centre—He is close beside us; and we, have we not each one our own deep need of Him? Have we not each one our own burden?—the

“young daughter who lieth at home grievously afflicted,” whom He only can heal? Whether it be some outward or some inward trial; some family sorrow, or some heart-ache; the secret wasting of some spirit-wound, some pang of conscience, some sense of sin, or some besetting temptation; or whether it be the world’s hollowness, and the thirst of the soul for truth and reality,—have we not each one our need of Him, in the midst of evils of which He can be the only Healer?

And then, further; do not characters now divide off and part asunder even as they did then? Are there not those who, like the Jews, know not the office of this Healer; who hear all His words, and see all His signs, and languidly let Him pass, or angrily murmur at Him, or blasphem-

ously drive Him from them ; from whom He passes, even to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, to pour on others the blessing they refuse ? But then there are also those who do seek Him with their whole heart,—unmarked, it may be, by any of the outward appearances which catch the eye of man,—living amongst their fellows, and not striving needlessly to differ from them, yet seeking Him as their all ; crying to Him in earnestness, even when He “ would be hid,” “ Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David !” opening to Him their hidden affliction ; bearing seeming refusals in the strength of faith and the patience of an unfeigned humility ; and still looking for crumbs, if they may not eat the children’s bread ; daring to hope against hope ; ready to take up

with any portion He shall give them; and waiting still on Him, because they cannot turn to any other. Such, no doubt, there are amongst us; and for each of these there is their own lesson. May God give us grace to learn it!

I. There is the lesson taught us by the Jews, that He does pass away from those who will not stay Him with them; that He goes on and heals others; and that they die unhealed, because they knew not "the time of their visitation." And the root of this evil is here pointed out to us: it is a want of faith, and, from this, a lack of the power of spiritual discernment. Such men are purblind: the full light of heaven shines in vain for them. They do not intend to reject the Christ, but they know Him not; their gaze is

too idle, too impassive, to discover Him. They know not that they have deep needs which He only can satisfy. They yet dream of slaking their thirst at other streams. They know not that they must find peace with themselves through finding peace with God, and peace with God only through His cross; and so, whilst those who know their need press closer to it, they shrink aside from it, and lose sight of Him; and He passes from them, it may be altogether; so that they never find out Him, without whom the whole world is a bewildering show, and life a burden, which waxes more perplexing and fatiguing the longer it is borne.

II. But there is also here the lesson of the woman of Canaan; and this has many aspects; of which the first, per-

haps, is this, that by every mark and token which the stricken soul can read, He to whom she sought is the only Healer of humanity, the true portion and rest of every heart;—that He would teach us this by all the discipline of outward things; that the ties of family-life are meant thus to train up our weak affections till they are fitted to lay hold on Him; that the eddies and sorrows of life are meant to sweep us from its flowery banks, that in its deep strong currents we may cry to Him; that for this end He opens to us, by little and little, the mystery of trouble round us, the mystery of evil within us, that we may fly from others and ourselves to Him.

III. And, once more, there is this further lesson, that He will most surely be

found by those who do seek after Him. And this is taught us here, not by a mere general assurance that we shall be heard, but in a way which enters far more practically into those difficulties with which every one who has striven to pray earnestly finds earnest prayer beset. For here we see why it often happens that really earnest and sincere men seem, for a time at least, to pray in vain ; why their “ Lord, help me ! ” is not answered by a word. It is not that Christ is not near us ; it is not that His ear is heavy ; it is not that the tenderness of His sympathy is blunted. It is a part of His plan of faithfulness and wisdom. He has a double purpose herein. He would bless by it both us and all His Church.

How could His Church have been

taught always to pray, and not to faint, better than by such a narrative as this? How many a fainting soul has gathered strength for one more hour of patient supplication by thinking on this Canaanitish mother; on her seeming rejection, on her blessed success at last!

And for ourselves, too, there is a special mercy in these long-delayed blessings. For it is only by degrees that the work within us can be perfected; it is only by steps, small and almost imperceptible as we are taking them, yet one by one leading us to unknown heights, that we can mount up to the golden gate before us. The ripening of these precious fruits must not be forced. We have many lessons to learn, and we can learn them but one by one. And much are we

taught by these delayed answers to our prayers. By them the treasure of our hearts is cleared from dross, as in the furnace-heat; our earthly will is purified and bowed; the passionate fervency of unchastened prayer is deepened into the strong breath of humble supplication; we “wait upon the Lord, who hideth His face;” the frowardness of our hearts is checked; patience has her perfect work; we are kept looking up to Christ; we watch Him by faith; and by His grace, even as we hang upon Him, we grow like unto Him; His secret work goes on in us; we see Him as once we saw Him not, amidst the shadows of this busy life of trifles; we hear His voice, for we are used to watch for it; we dwell in Him, and He in us.

Nor can we ever pray in vain, if we will but persevere in praying. When we gain not our suit at once, we are ever too ready to desist; therefore is it that the Lord withholds the answer, that we may learn to persevere in asking; that we may grow to trust His love, to know what He is to us, yea what He is to all who wait upon Him.

He would but teach us to come to Him at once for all, and not to leave Him until we have won our suit. He would but have us know that we may thus deal with Him; that we want no intercessor with Him who is Himself the true and only Intercessor; that nothing is to be interposed between our souls and Him; that He is the portion of those souls; and that we may go straight to Him.

Only let us, then, deal thus with Him; let us open to Him our grief, our sin, our shame, our difficulties; let us shew Him our need; tell Him where, "at home," hidden from the rude eye of the world, but known to Him, is the "young daughter grievously afflicted;" plead with Him by His covenant of tears: and even as we enter with Him into that cloud, on us too shall come forth the sense of a presence which this world knows not; and a voice shall speak to us which the world cannot hear; and we shall be alone with Him; and He shall call us by our name, and we shall be His.

SERMON IV.
THE PUNISHMENT OF JACOB'S SIN.

Preached in the Chapel of the Pavilion, Brighton,
Feb. 27, 1842.

SERMON IV.

THE PUNISHMENT OF JACOB'S SIN.

GEN. xlvii. 9.

“ And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years : few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.”

THERE is perhaps no Old Testament saint whose life and character supplies so much or such various instruction as that of the patriarch Jacob. But amidst these many lessons, one stands out with a distinctive clearness, and this alone will occupy us to-day ; and that is, the sin which he

committed in deceiving his father Isaac, and the influence which this seems to have exerted on all his after-life. The record of his sin was read to us in the first lesson for last Sunday's service, and some of its bitter consequences come before us in the lessons of to-day : it is written down with all the detailed fidelity which marks, in so wonderful a manner, the narratives of God's word ; and it will not need many words to bring it again clearly before our recollection.

Jacob and Esau, the twin-sons of Isaac, grew up together in their father's sight with widely different dispositions. Jacob was " a plain man, dwelling in tents," whilst Esau was " a cunning hunter." Every incident of Jacob's life points to the same stamp of character,—

a man of domestic habits and ready family affections ; inapt for active or daring conduct, but inclined to value highly the peculiar blessings which belonged to him as one of the heirs of promise ;—taking a thoughtful view of life, disposed probably to melancholy, to forecasting the future, and living over the past in plaintive musing. In early manhood the contrast of their characters comes strongly out. The promise of God before he was born had allotted the birthright to Jacob, though he was the younger son. This, no doubt, he had learned from Rebecca, and his mind dwelt upon it. It was a great thing in his eyes,—the mysterious promise to Abraham should run in his line ; in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. His soul reached

on to discover the great purposes which these declarations at once revealed and shrouded; but thus much was clear, he was to be pre-eminently the heir of promise; God would be especially his God, and he should be peculiarly His son; and in this thought his soul rejoiced. Yet such is the manifold weakness of humanity, that even from this sprung his temptation. He longed to make this his own—to secure it for himself. It was the very fault to which his character was liable. He should have waited for God to work out His own purposes in His own way. But he did not. He tempted his impetuous, carnal-minded brother profanely to sell his birth-right; and thus he laid the foundation of his own sin, committed so many years

afterwards. For his giving way to Rebecca's evil counsel was but the carrying out this first fault to greater lengths.

The temptation came to him in a most dangerous form. His aged father was about to bestow the blessing on Esau his favourite son. Jacob knew that it was his own, even by the warrant of God's promise ; years ago, moreover, he had secured the birthright, and now he was about to lose the blessing :—that mysterious gift, on which he had so often mused,—by which his brother set so little store, which was so great in his eyes,—he was about to lose it. Then stood the tempter by him, and plied him with suggestions, through his mother's voice. She told him how, by personating Esau, he might secure the blessing. At first he

refused to follow her counsel, fearing, however, as it seems, not so much the sin as its detection : “ I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing.” But in a little while he yielded. He had prepared himself for this offence, by seeking, in the matter of the birthright, to force God’s providence ; and so he now consents to take one further step. He stands before his father prepared to act a lie ; but he must do more—mere equivocation will not serve his purpose ; the awakened suspicions of the old man force him by degrees—such a fearful power of growth is there in sin—solemnly to assert and re-assert his falsehood ; he mocks cruelly the dim sight of the aged patriarch, and he obtains the blessing. His artifice had thoroughly succeeded : he had gained the

blessing and gone out before Esau came ; he saw not when the old man “ trembled very exceedingly,” and he learned that his father had confirmed the stolen benediction, and, yielding at last to God’s disposal, had solemnly asserted, “ yea, and he shall be blessed !”

So that here, where the lesson of last Sunday left him, his fraud would seem to have prospered altogether. Yet look a little closer into the matter, and mark its issue, and we shall see that this is only the first appearance. He had indeed obtained the blessing ; but this he would have done if he had used no fraud, for God had given it him by promise. This, therefore, was not the fruit of his falsehood : without that falsehood God’s purpose would have wrought out its own

fulfilment. But the circumstances which accompanied his success, these were the true result of his sinful interference with God's unknown plan, these were what he reaped from his crooked counsels. And what were these? They began to shew themselves at once; and they fell heavily, not only on himself, but on his mother also; from whom the son whom she loved with such a partial fondness was suddenly torn, by the direct consequence of the sin to which she had tempted him—and torn for life, for her eyes were closed in death before the time of Jacob's return.

And just as immediately began his own punishment. Esau's rage led to his solitary flight from his father's tent. No faithful Eliezar was sent for him, to bring the chosen

damsel from Nahor. Alone, and in danger from his brother, he was a fugitive in the desert, because he had stolen the blessing. What thoughts must have been his, when in the wide waste he lay down to sleep, with the stones as his pillow, and there gathered round his closing eyes the image of the mother who had led him into sin—of the angry brother whom he dreaded—of the dim-sighted patriarch whom he had deceived! And when he came to Bethuel, how did the curse still follow him! how was the deceiver deceived! Laban's treachery in behalf of his elder daughter avenged his own deceit against his elder brother. How often, and how treacherously, were his wages changed! and, worse by far than this, how did the original deceit concerning Leah cling to

him in its consequences through his whole life! For hence came all that embittered Jacob's after-years. The family dissensions which ever after troubled him—the cruel treachery of Simeon and Levi—the wickedness of Reuben—above all, perhaps, the hatred of his other sons to his beloved Joseph—the sale of Joseph into Egypt—the bitter tears of the bereaved parent—his lamentation over the coat of many colours,—what were all of these but the consequences, one after another, of this first sin; until in old age he looked back upon the pilgrimage through which he had been led, and comparing his life with that of his patriarch fathers, pronounced, in solemn sentence on himself, before the king of Egypt, that his days had been few and evil, and that the grey hairs

which sorrow had thinned were going prematurely down to their appointed grave?

And what, then, when we look more closely, are the lessons taught us by the fall of Jacob? There are two which we should gather: a lesson of solemn warning amidst the temptations of life; and one of joyful submission amidst its afflictions. Let us shortly follow out each of these.

I. And, first, it is written in this history, as with the clearness of a sunbeam—"Be sure thy sin shall find thee out."¹ The stages of retribution are most distinct and remarkable. It begins at once, and by the natural working of ordinary causes. No interruption of the

¹ Numb. xxxii. 23.

common course of life was needed to chasten Jacob. No angel came from heaven to smite him. The thunder of God's throne seemed to sleep as he spoke out his falsehood. But yet the moral government of God was avenged. Esau's wrath and Laban's crafty covetousness became, in the natural consequence of Jacob's sin, the scourges of that sin. Then, too, how striking is the character of his chastisement! Deceit had been his sin: deceit became the instrument of his punishment. Just as it was in the case of David, where the chastisement took the colour of the crime; where he that had disregarded the sanctity of family life was miserably entangled ever afterward in his own family by the violated bonds of family duty; where he who had broken into the

mysterious house of life found the sword ever devouring in his own house ;—so was it with Jacob. He had deceived a father, and robbed a brother : and his mother's brother fatally deceived him ; and his own sons sold their brother into Egypt, and lied most cruelly to him their broken-hearted father.

Surely all this does stamp an awful character on sin ; surely it shews us that, in the very nature of things, as God has ordered them, it must bring misery ; that we are now under a law of moral government ; and that, without any visible and direct interference from God, sin will be of itself the chastiser of the sinner ; that crooked counsels will be confounding counsels ; that he who strives to weave

in a falsehood into his life, is weaving into it the thread of certain misery and failure; that there needs no suspension of the ordinary laws of Providence to punish transgression; that no fire need fall from heaven to strike down guilt with sudden violence; that the hand of a just God is truly governing all things, though He sees best to veil its working for a season; that the whole system of things round us, if we will study it, is bearing its clear though noiseless witness to His holy government; that His plans are ever moving onward, to the deep harmonies of truth and holiness; and that whatever is not attuned to these is indeed a jarring note in His creation, which must be silenced. That all sin,

therefore, is weakness, miserable weakness, and must in its event be seen to be so.

And this lesson is made far more striking by the fact, that Jacob was an eminent servant of God. For in him, therefore, we see not the punishment of a reprobate, but the chastisement of a son. There is, indeed, a certain character of retribution about these sufferings—that is to say, there is in them a testimony to God's holiness; yet still they are widely different from the strokes of anger, and so far, greatly more instructive. They were sufferings which repentance and acceptance with God did not turn aside: a point which cannot be too carefully noted, as being one of the deepest practical importance. And what can be more clear,

both here and elsewhere, than that this is the true character of such inflictions? Who ever received a more complete message of forgiveness than David? nevertheless the stripes continued. Who was ever more comforted and sustained by blessed encouragement, by visions, by marks of favour, by tokens of God's presence, than Jacob? yet the afflictions lasted on. And why? because they were not the visitations of wrath, but the necessary chastisements of love. So that they let us the more deeply into this awful secret of God's dealing with us, that sin MUST bring suffering: and, therefore, that for every one whose life is not a mad dream and a bursting bubble, to seek earnestly after holiness is to seek after peace; for that, in spite of outward appearances,

in the deep realities of happiness or of misery, this law is fulfilled even here: that the man who lives the most near to God is really the happiest man; that we carve out for ourselves afflictions by making them necessary; that our careless lives make sorrows the very answers of our prayers; that if we will sin, these become ever needful for us as a remedial process; and that to be left without them would be far more awful. For to be left to live in sin without tasting of its present bitterness is the awful condition of the hopeless reprobate. To find, therefore, no evident checks in such a course, is a fearful symptom of being utterly forsaken—for these checks are the discipline needful for our cure. No doubt, Jacob would never have learned

thoroughly to hate deceit in himself, if it had not stricken him so sorely ; no doubt, he would never have loathed his own sin entirely, if its hateful features had not thus, through all his after-life, met him at new turns of sorrow ; no doubt, he could not otherwise have learned to leave to God the working out of His own councils. So that the sharp sting of present pain, which is God's constant testimony, through conscience, against sin, is but an intimation of the universal law of His government ; and all the secret hopes by which we strive to silence this warning, and whisper to ourselves that, in our case, sin will not bring misery, are met here. We see that, if we will sin, we must suffer ; that our sins do not, as we are ready to believe, of themselves leave us as soon as

we have committed them, but that they stay with us, and become part of us. We are the same persons who committed them ; and, in committing them, made the sinful thing a part of ourselves—clogged our souls with the thick clay. So that, at any moment, our lives are really the product of all the separate actions, and feelings, and influences through which we have been passing. We have been weaving the web of our life, and it abides still coloured by the threads that we have woven into it ; and, as far as we can see, sorrow is even needful as the means of tearing out the lines of past permitted evil. Not that we are to find our atonement in our sorrows—God forbid ; for if it were so, our case were utterly beyond the reach of remedy, since all our woe could not atone

for any one transgression; but because, through God's blessing on it, suffering is made a means of carrying on His cure within us. Not, indeed, by any virtue of its own; for sorrow and pain have no power to renew the heart of man: of themselves, they do but sour and irritate his spirit. He needs a deeper and a more effectual cure; and it is only when sorrow brings us to Him who can work this within us, that it is a blessing. Then, indeed, under the blessed leading of His grace, it turns into the choicest mercy. For, to the Christian man, there is this mystery in it: it does bring us to Him who is the true and only purifier, by driving us from the world and from ourselves to Him; by bending our separate wills to His will; by leading us to wait on Him —

to seek His purifying Spirit—to cling to the cross of His Son, with all its bitter pains ; by setting before us long-past sins, even as certain changes in the atmosphere bring out again the faded spots of worn-out stains. So that this connexion between suffering and transgression rests not on an arbitrary decree, which may be dispensed with in our case, but on the necessity of God's holy nature, on the one hand, and on the very needs of the nature He has given us, on the other. There can, in this world, be no divorce between these true yoke-fellows, sin and suffering. The man who allows himself in any iniquity is taking burning coals into his bosom ; and how deeply they may wound him, God only knows. Jacob's life was scarred by

them, until they brought down his grey hairs, after many sorrows, to the grave.

Here, then, is the lesson of solemn warning; and close beside it is that of joyful submission amidst the afflictions of life.

II. For what a character does this truth stamp upon them! They are, indeed, we know, the consequence of sin; perhaps we may even be able to trace them up to some sin of our own in years long past; and in this there must be bitterness. But then, what joy is there in this thought, — which is the privilege of every believer in Jesus — they are NOT the strokes of anger; they are the blessed remedies of the most kind and skilful of physicians. Here is the great glory of the Gospel of

our peace. Not that the laws of God's righteous government are broken to permit us to escape; for this were no comfort to God's people—nay, rather it would be to break up the rule and foundation of right; but that, for every true believer in Him, the sufferings of Christ have made so full an atonement, that there can remain no debt for him to pay; that all his sufferings, therefore, have changed their character; that “if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sin;”¹ and that for His merit's sake alone, if our trust be truly in Him, we know that we are accepted.

For we do not, as some would have us do—we do not, we cannot, doubt of

¹ 1 John ii. 2.

the full and ready remission of the sin of every sinner who comes with his heavy burden to the cross of Christ. We know that it is no humility, but flat unbelief, to doubt of God's certain pardon to every returning penitent. We know that to condemn men who have sinned to groan under the chain of perpetual doubts and fears, is a grievous injury to them, and a gross insult to Christ's Gospel; that it is to rob it of its special attribute of healing mercy, and, as far as we can, to root out of their hearts the spirit of filial confidence, and with it the very possibility of true penitence. For it is, indeed, the certainty of God's mercy which gives their healing power to all His chastisements of sin. This is what makes them more than barely supportable to those that wait on

Him. For who that knows the evil of his sickness, or the blessedness of a cure, would choose to be without them? See, then, the true character they wear, whenever and however they are sent. They have ever formed the thorny hedge which, at some period of their lives, has shut in the path along which God's chosen ones have been led on to glory. They are proofs that we are under training. They shew that we have a part in the covenant. They give us good reason to hope that the blessed Spirit has not left us; nay, that He is striving with us, and perfecting for us His blessed work. With what words, therefore, of love does He uphold us in our sharpest sufferings: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."¹

¹ Heb. xii. 6, 7.

“God dealeth with you as with sons.”¹

“Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings;”² and hear how His children have replied,—“Before I was afflicted, I went wrong; but now have I kept Thy word.”³

And here is the true secret of peace in this world of trouble,—to yield ourselves always meekly, as the redeemed of Christ, to the hand of God, as of a loving father; to know that this is the especial character of our lives, that we are not under a grinding rule of blind necessity, nor under a harsh rod of vindictive infliction, but in a process of restoration; that joy and sorrow are mingled for us, as He sees best for us; that our joys are but His love, our sorrows but the deeper tones of

¹ Heb. xii. 6, 7. ² 1 Pet. iv. 13. ³ Ps. cxix. 67.

that same love ; that we are safe whilst He bids the sun still to shine around us, for that we are His ; and that He will keep us in the dangerous sunshine. Nor do the clouds on the horizon trouble us, for they cannot dim that sunshine so long as He sees that it is best for us to walk with Him in its glad brightness. It may be He will accept our quiet waiting upon Him, and so teach us through it that we shall hardly need the rougher discipline of sharp affliction. Or if our sun threaten to go down in darkness—if the clouds gather over it in gloom, still we are with Him ; and to be with Him is, for every child of His, the most really to be at peace. In the storm, He whom we love more than life comes oftentimes the closest to us ; and by the blessed power of that divine

Presence, the world, when it is the barest to the eye of sense, abounds the most richly in the truest consolation ; and the sharp edge of earthly anguish grows into the severe reality of heavenly joy. Jacob would doubtless have borne gladly his banishment again, to see again the sights of Bethel, and hear the voice which then broke upon his ear : and from Christ's saints now, in their hour of trouble, when He so wills it, that ladder is not hidden ; for them now there is a voice which says, " I am with thee, and will keep thee ; . . . and will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of ;"¹ yea, " I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."²

¹ Gen. xxviii. 15.² Joshua i. 5.

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